

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Saturday, November 12, 2022

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 24, Wisconsin 10

KIRK FERENTZ: I told the team, we've talked about November football, and for me it was a classic example of November football in our conference. Tough conditions weather-wise, and a couple things we really thought coming into the game, we'd have to play tough because Wisconsin is a really tough option. Playing clean football is huge for us and huge for them, and it's been that way historically in this series, and it's been that way for both teams really this year, if you look back in the stats for both teams.

Then the other thing is you have to make plays when they do present themselves, and our guys did a good job of that. It wasn't easy, wasn't clean, but overall did a really nice job. Just really proud of our players for getting the victory, proud of them for getting the trophy back and having that in our building for a while.

Defense played really well. Good job stopping the run. Outside of a bust we had in the coverage, pretty good job on pass defense, as well. That was good to see.

Had some ups and downs, but more ups on special teams. Obviously, the blocked punt was a big play in the game, and then really the sequence where we were able to kill the ball down on their 1-yard line, give them a long field and then Cooper followed it up with a punt return and then we were able to finish that drive off, that was a really big swing in the game.

Offensively, we have a lot of work to do still. I was kind of disappointed up front. It didn't look real good for the most part, but a couple positives there when we did get the ball inside the red zone. We finished, put the ball in the end zone instead of field goals, so that was a positive, and then the end of the game, to hold the ball and make them burn their timeouts, I'm not sure I saw that coming, so that was encouraging, too.

They're a good group. They need more experience, more work, and we'll get back to work on Monday with them.

Those guys don't give up, so we'll be okay there.

Just encouraged the team to enjoy this one. They earned it, it was hard fought and they earned it, so proud of their effort, proud of the staff and the plan they put together, and we'll enjoy this one and turn the page tomorrow.

**Q. We talked to Cooper; he says he can't drop-kick a field goal. Are you amazed how he can affect the game in so many different areas --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's probably not a position on the perimeter he couldn't play. You'd have to change your offense if he was your quarterback.

But I'm pretty sure he could be a pretty good running back, I know he could be a really good receiver, and you think about the four positions on defense in the back end plus the nickelback, the slot guy, so there's five right there.

It's just an unusual skill set, if you will. Micah Hyde probably the closest thing maybe we had, maybe Desmond, but Micah is probably the better reach there.

Then the most amazing part is he wasn't recruited, especially in this day and age where there's no secrets.

On top of it, he's a great young guy and just a great team member. Quite an effort tonight from him.

**Q. He played some smaller class football; how much do you think the fact that he had to do a lot in high school, that it's an advantage when he comes here?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just playing sports. I'll put a plug in for parents. Being a multi-sport athlete, it seems like anybody who's smart I talk to in football, they endorse that, the people in the NFL. You can usually go back and trace that; like the good ball skill guys, they played stuff other than just football growing up. Sometimes they didn't play football until later.

But yeah, just going out and doing stuff is overlooked right now. Everybody is in this age of specialization and all that crazy stuff. Just let kids be kids and let them go out and play.



**Q. Today you had Cooper and Deontae make huge special teams plays. These are defensive starters, and I know it's nothing new for your starters to make big special teams plays, but how have you made special teams something that starters want to do?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That goes back to day one, 23 plus years ago. That was one thing that was just a building block for our program. Two reasons for it. Number one, figured it was the first thing maybe we could get good at because we weren't very good at anything initially. So that was that.

Part of the reason is you don't have to be as veteran of a player, I don't think, to be a good special teams player; there's not quite as much learning. There is learning and there's obviously calls and schemes and all that, but it's not quite -- the experience doesn't factor in. If you have a good attitude and you're really a tough-minded guy, it gives you a chance.

Fast forward then, the dilemma becomes as you get a little bit down the road hopefully, thinking about guys like Abdul Hodge, Greenway, Dallas Clark, how much do you use them on special teams because they're so valuable on defense, too.

So now you circle back to Cooper who's easily leading the team in snaps right now. I think probably the only time he comes off would be kickoff, kickoff return. I think that's correct. And then the field goal teams, he's not on those. He's playing every snap on defense.

A, we don't have a choice right now. We're not the deepest outfit. But our guys take pride in that, and the good players I've been around want to play on special teams, and then we have to pull them back. But if there's a way to get a guy who maybe is a second team that can play as effectively, we're going to give that guy the opportunity. There's a little bit more buy-in and they're more part of the team, feel like they're more part of the team. That's kind of been our philosophy for a couple decades here.

But it's tough sometimes because some guys can really make a difference, and it's going to be hard to take him off any of these teams moving forward.

**Q. I can't think of a time where you've had a defense where you could completely rely upon their game plan almost. They're just so dominant --**

KIRK FERENTZ: '04 was a little bit like that, too, where we weren't where we needed to be offensively, and at least you go into a game thinking that you've got a chance with a

couple segments maybe and then if you can do something else.

But I don't mind telling you that was prominent in my thoughts today, certainly about how we approached the second half. Same way the last three weeks, actually. You want to be smart in that second half and not put those guys in a really bad position.

You can't pull it all the way back, but -- then part of that, too, is it's just a feel. I've been around some really good defenses that have tough days, and then you've got to play accordingly, but today our guys were really -- outside of that one pass, we were on to have top of our game pretty good.

**Q. Since Ohio State, I asked you specifically if there are times when things like this could snowball one of two directions and I actually just said is it possible to go in the right direction over the final six games, and you said it's not only possible, I believe that it's possible and it's going to happen. Here you are three games later, your defense is dominating, you've won three games. What has led you guys to doing it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the answer I'd give, there's a visitor in town here I'm pretty close with who really knows football, knows people, and he knows our program, and he was just in the locker room there talking about our guys and the way they are. He really likes our team.

That's what I'd go back to, and it's been pretty consistent since January. These guys have worked hard. Really like any team, we have the guys at the top that know how to act and know how to be leaders, and then you've got guys in the middle trying to figure it out, and then you've got some guys at the bottom that have no idea what's going on most of the time. But we have enough guys at the top that have been really strong.

I couldn't sign off on that three weeks ago, four weeks ago, but you bet on people, and you bet on people that you've been around and see how they respond.

I'm thinking right now about Jack Campbell. You guys trying to give him to crack. I don't mean that in a bad way, but that's the game that gets played. Not only did he deflect that question, he stood up and was strong. That's who he is. That's how he is, and we have a lot of guys like that on our team. That's really helpful.

**Q. Was there chatter in the locker room about the Purdue game earlier and how that could impact you guys' chances of winning the West?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't spend a lot of time in the locker room. Today you mean? I just kind of get in and out. As the game gets closer, I try to give our players space, but I doubt it. I really doubt it. I don't think anybody is thinking about a pennant race right now. I think we're all thinking about trying to get our third win. We've got two left now.

So all that stuff, it's supposed to be -- it's like last year, it doesn't look good, and then all of a sudden we're in Indy. My experience is like, don't worry about it. Let's just worry about Wisconsin. We had our hands full today, and we knew that going in. We'll have our hands full again next week and the week after. I just try to keep looking at what's in front of us.

**Q. You'll see some head coaches when their team is struggling they'll make big changes, they'll panic in some ways. You've never been that way. Why is that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It gets back to the people you work with. If you believe in the people you're with -- you're always trying to look for a better way. That's our job. That's what all coaches do. We talk about it frequently as a staff.

But as I said whenever, I believe we have quality people in the program. I think we have a pretty good coaching staff. Got a lot of guys around the game that know what they're doing and teach it well. They're good for our players.

I really believe in our players. Again, we have different levels on the team, but it's that way every team we've ever had, so as long as you've got enough guys at the top that are really helping drive things, then you've got a shot.

**Q. A couple offensive linemen got banged up; what the latest with Stephens and Plumb?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think Jack is OK. I think he is. And Stephens, he came out and couldn't go back in, so we'll see. We'll know Tuesday probably.

**Q. What about Arland Bruce?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't want to say I'm pretty sure he's going to play next week, but I'm hopeful he is. I think he had a chance this week and just couldn't make it as of yesterday morning. I think it's realistic to think we'll get him back.

That's the other dilemma with Cooper (DeJean) because I was thinking about that, you lose a really good corner playing the gunner when he's returning, but it turned out to be a good trade today, so we'll see what it looks like next week.

**Q. On offense, it wasn't there in raw stats, but situationally they did their job and came away with 17 key points. How would you assess how they've improved in that area the last few weeks?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was major because we've had situations where we were in great position and end up with a field goal. You just keep doing that, and at some point it's going to catch up to you, and it has caught up to us a little bit, so that was really encouraging. Start with that first one; I think it was two, three plays, and just were able to put it in there.

That's progress, but just the overall continuity today, cohesiveness, it wasn't there. It was hard to give Spencer a good pocket to work off of, and we never really were consistent in the run game.

But I'm sure it's addressable. Again, I think these guys have been improving week to week, and we'll try to shore it up next week. We're going to have to.

**Q. To go back to Cooper, I think he's probably one of the most highly decorated high school athletes in the state's history, true sophomore, playing four, five different positions. I guess maybe a two-part question. Do people on the outside understand how difficult that is to go in there and to do that at such a high level? And two, how much of a testament is that to him that he's able to make all these different contributions in so many different areas?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a huge testament. I'm not sure anybody could appreciate it, and why would you, but we do as coaches. The other thing, he just makes it look easy, which is kind of amazing, too.

Good players have a way of doing that sometimes, but it's not easy. You're talking about all the mental intricacies because he can play in the safety position for us, too.

It's all a positive. And then fielding punts in November is not easy, either, and he looked like he was under control the whole way there.

It's just some guys -- I'm not saying you're just born that way, but his whole development, his whole lifetime has just been playing ball and competing, and go back to that state championship game where it was ridiculous what he did, recovered an onside kick, scored. It's just like somebody wrote a script on that stuff.

But one thing I've learned, I don't think that stuff is accidental. Jovon Johnson was the same way. My mentor basically screamed at me to -- you guys need to recruit this

guy, because I was too smart, and no, we don't need this guy; he's too small. All he did was get an interception every day in practice. That's just what he did. So sometimes you've got to believe production and what guys do.

**Q. Do you see that day in and day out in practice, just the accumulation of --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he just doesn't screw stuff up. It doesn't sound very hard and all that, but he has to do -- he's playing a tough position to play. But it's really not too often when he makes a mistake mentally, and for a young guy, it's a big stage out there. He's playing on a big stage. To be that poised, to be that confident, at least seemingly confident, yeah, it's really unusual. Just really glad he's on our football team.

**Q. The quarterback, I'd say other than maybe a basketball player or two, no athlete I've ever seen has got more battered in this school than him over the years. He's had some rough -- he got benched for a second half, still came back and started. Today he got sacked six times but he keeps coming back. What is it about him mentally that allows him to continue to just compete and not have it accumulate on him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think probably the number one attribute to be good, I think, in anything that's challenging and tough is to have mental toughness. Anybody can have that. Anybody is capable. It's not something -- you don't get it in the weight room or it's not a clock measurement and all that kind of stuff, but if you're going to do something that's hard to do, and playing quarterback at this level is really hard to do. Boy, if you don't have that, it's going to be tough to be any good because you're going to have tough times, and he's had more than his share. Some of his own accord and others things he couldn't do anything about.

But I'll tell you, he stays positive, he's a great teammate, and just keeps chipping away, and somehow, some way, we've won a lot of games when he's in there.

A lot of respect for him certainly, and this has not been an easy year for anybody, and probably he'd be first on the list, I think, for that. Really it's a credit to him just to keep pushing forward.

**Q. In regards to special teams, you said earlier this week that was an area that you would need production out of. Maybe in past match-ups it hasn't gone your way, but they had two big plays that set up offensive touchdowns and Drew had the field goal. What enabled them to have such a productive day today?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we missed a couple opportunities which was disappointing earlier, some plus-50 stuff where you hope you make them go the long field, especially on tough, tough conditions like this. So that was kind of -- I always worry about those things; is that going to catch up to us as this game goes on. But then we were able to come back, and putting that one on the 1 was really big for us, just kind of gave us a boost.

Drew, I'm not going to say he's Cooper, but in some ways this guy just seems pretty unflappable, too. It's probably good he hit the goal post last week; it'll keep him humble a little bit. But he's done a pretty good job. He really has.

You get some good individual efforts and then the group collectively, and a guy like Jay Higgins, going back to the backup thing, Jay would be starting most years for us right now at linebacker, but you've got a couple guys that are pretty good, and so when we're in three-backer defense, he's in there, and then he's playing great on special teams, too, and he's a great young guy, too.

Going back to the leadership guys, you're not going to find a more positive and just totally invested guy. In his case, he could be pouting because he's not starting, but I think he's smart enough to know we've got two veteran guys that are pretty good.

All those things going together give you a chance to have some good special teams units, and he's clearly one of our leaders out there. Just a highly respected guy.

**Q. To go out there and physically go toe-to-toe and win that battle against that team, what does it mean for you now today and the program?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's big. The way I looked at it and this goes back 23 plus years, they were at the top, they literally were at the top and we helped them do a victory lap up there in Madison. But that was good.

The one positive -- I tried to find positives that year, and the one positive I told our guys, that's how it's supposed to look like. That's what you want. That's where you want to be. We obviously had a long road, so it took us, whatever it was, four years to catch them finally.

And then the series has gone back and forth, but I've got a lot of respect for them as a program. They're built on defense. They're built on being physical. They play sound, smart football. I respect anybody that kind of fits in that category, and they've done it pretty consistently.

In fact, probably as consistently as anybody outside of



Ohio State in our conference over the last seven, eight years.

To beat them, again, that's the first thing I told our guys on Monday, Monday team meeting, was just understand, if we're going to win this game, we're going to have to earn it because don't expect any freebies. We're not going to get anything easy out of this. We're going to have to go out and play and win it, earn it, or you're going to go home sad. We've had a few of those, and it's not much fun.

**Q. You haven't beaten Wisconsin since 2008 with fans in this building. I asked a couple players if they knew that, and they didn't. Was that a cognizant decision to not press that, and how good does it feel to get it done with fans?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Two things. I didn't know it, either, so yeah, I didn't know it, either.

I'm acutely aware of our record the last five years against them just like Purdue's. The message there is this is 2022. We've got a new team, they've got a new team, and home or away, let's go play and see what we can do. I thought our guys were just taking advantage of it and doing a good job.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

**Wisconsin vs. Iowa  
Nov. 12, 2022  
Kinnick Stadium  
Iowa Player Quotes**

**DB Kaevon Merriweather:**

*On changes made...*

"We didn't put our heads down and consider the season as a failure. We kept working each and every day. We knew who we were as a team and as a defense and offense, and our units just came together. We refuse to put our heads down. We want to keep pushing."

*On improvements...*

"I feel like we are a lot better from a DB standpoint. We're thinking the same thing. We're on the same page, other than the one play at the end of the half. I think the coaches do a great job preparing us as DBs, but also as a whole defense. We're still pushing to see how good this defense is."

*On tip to Moss...*

"It was just game plan, I think. We understand what Wisconsin wanted to do from a passing standpoint. I felt bad for Riley, he hadn't had a pick yet, so I thought I'd tip it up to him. Just being prepared."

**LB Jack Campbell:**

*On B1G/Wisconsin physicality...*

"We were playing physical up front, trying to make it easy on the backs. It's the will versus the run, so if you're willing to go out there and stop the run then good things can happen. You can't really teach people that, and I think that is a sign of a Phil Parker defense. He brings in guys that are willing to get after it."

*On Cooper DeJean...*

"He's a special kid and special player, too. You obviously see it out there, he is going to continue to do great things."

*On physicality...*

"When you sign your National Letter of Intent to play at a Big Ten university, these are the kinds of games you fantasize about. It's such a blessing to be able to

compete with some of the best in the nation. All of us are really blessed with the opportunity. Again, we were able to control the line of scrimmage tonight.”

*On recovering Logan’s ball for him...*

“I was trying to aim for his family. It’s special when you get the ball. They thought I was trying to steal it. I got the ball and was just trying to do something special for Logan. I grabbed it and sprinted toward the sideline. I know where the parents sit, and I saw his wife up there. I hummed it, but it was a trash throw. It’s a good thing I don’t play quarterback. I think I hit someone in the head. We have to figure out if they got it.”

**TE Sam LaPorta:**

*On what has changed for Iowa in the second half of the season...*

“It’s the collective efforts every week. Putting everything together to come away and get the win. Like I mentioned last week, I feel like we still have our best football to play and I still believe that. A few weeks ago, it just wasn’t showing yet for us and I think it is starting to turn around a little bit, but we have to keep progressing.”

*On how Iowa bounced back the past few weeks...*

“A lot of people nowadays have a glass jaw and if they get knocked on your butt, they don’t want to get back up. That three-game losing streak, that was really tough for us. There’s a lot of senior leadership that pulled together and brought everybody closer to one another without wedging us apart. We only care about the people’s opinions inside the locker room and inside our building. I don’t know if you could have told me a couple of weeks ago that this is what it would look like, but we still have two games ahead of us and we’re happy that we kind of have our fate in our own hands. Let’s see what we can do with it, a game at a time.”

**DB Cooper DeJean:**

*On his impact on defense (pick 6) and special teams...*

“It’s a lot of fun. I love playing the game of football so anytime I get to be out on the field I just enjoy the moment.”

*(On the pick 6)*

“It was man coverage, I probably got beat a little bit. Then I came back out of it and I just saw the ball coming and had to make a play. Make a play there and then it was all green ahead.”

*(On downing the punt at the 1)*

"That's just going back to practice. We do that a few times a week in practice, tracking balls throughout the air and then other guys hustling down, too. Special teams is something everybody prides themselves in."

*On secondary elevating each other and competing...*

"I think it just goes back to our preparation throughout the week. We're always in the film room watching film together. Our coaches just wanted perfection out of us throughout the week each and every day we're on the practice field. We stress that we play at a championship level and give championship level effort every time we are on the field, whether that's practice or in the games. When it comes to down to Saturday, we always strive to be perfect, and I think that goes back to coach Parker."

### **QB Spencer Petras:**

*On how the game went today...*

"It was great. It's funny, because the game in 2020 was really sweet. A lot of guys that played in that one have a lot of fond memories. There were no fans, and that's the one downside. So, it felt good to win this one at home and to get that trophy that seemingly was always over there at the beginning of my career and over the last 10 years, it seems. It is great to get the win."

*On how the game went today...*

"Schematically they present some issues. You know what they're going to do, it's just challenging to beat it. I thought that we settled down in the second half with some good throws. I had pretty poor rhythm, I felt like, third quarter especially, but we were able to get back on track and obviously some big plays on defense allowed us to get into some more easy stuff in the pass game. Especially on third down, they can present challenging looks. That's where they get all these quarterbacks that they play. They mess with the quarterback's eyes. In their nickel packages, they move guys around quite a bit post-snap. We did a nice job, from a game-planning perspective, of trying to limit that and keep them as vanilla as we could. That helped. Good to get a win."

*On Iowa's regular success in the month November...*

"It's all our head coach. Our head coach does a great job throughout the year putting a ton of emphasis, maybe more than other teams, into (the idea that) it's a long race and you have to keep getting better week to week. Really, a good team should be peaking in November, and you do that by compound interest of months and months of work... It's been something our teams have done recently, and we have to continue to do it, because it pays off. This is when the games really count. Chips are on the line."



*On the Big Ten West division race...*

"I found out after the game that Purdue beat Illinois today. I don't know, I think it's a total waste of time for us to think about that because we have to beat a good Minnesota team and a good Nebraska team coming up. Obviously, we play Big Ten football to win the division. Having that, considering where things were a couple weeks ago, it is great. The second we set our sights on that, we are doing ourselves a disservice. You can't do it. You have to focus on beating Minnesota because the second you start looking at the standings and all that, you lose to Minnesota and it's over. We still have to keep our focus on what is important."

**DE Deontae Craig:**

*On how the game went today...*

"We knew coming into the game the question would be who is going to win upfront. It was a physical week. The guys were locked in. The coaches had us prepared. Wisconsin, you have to tip your hat to them. They've always got a good program -- great, big, physical offensive linemen, great backs -- so it was definitely a battle. We were lucky enough to come out on top."

*On what he saw before the blocked punt...*

"All week (special teams coach) LeVar Woods has been playing older clips of pro-style protection. The first couple times on the rushes, I saw him duck his head a little bit. The third time, coach gave me the freedom all week to take it up the field or duck it off inside, and I saw an opening, took it inside and was able to punch the ball."

*On the block...*

"I am feeling it right here in my forearm right now, but the "W" takes all the pain away. It was base-double, pro-style protection. I knew our ends were going to have an advantage over some of their protectors. Not just me, but everybody upfront did a great job of rushing all game. That's how things opened up like that."

*On his growth as a player this season...*

"It's not just me, it's everybody. If it wasn't for my teammates pushing me like they do, holding me accountable every day in practice, we wouldn't be here today. It goes back to trusting the work. The coaches do a great job all week putting together a great scheme so we can go out there and execute."